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Culture and its Transfer: Ways of Creating General Knowledge Through the Study of Cultural Particulars

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Abstract

Two perspectives of scientific inquiry–both making use of the notion of culture–are analyzed from the perspective of how general knowledge is being constructed by each. It is demonstrated how cross-cultural psychology has made use of traditional psychology's inductive emphasis on comparisons of samples (and generalization to populations). Cross-cultural psychology has been a part of general and differential psychologies. In contrast, the cultural psychology that has developed in parallel with cross-cultural psychology on the basis of anthropology and developmental psychology has been built upon the notion of systemic causality, and on the basis of developmental assumptions. There is overlap in the practical work of cultural and cross-cultural psychologists–cross-cultural evidence can be used in cultural-psychological theorizing. Both disciplines share the focus on interdisciplinary cooperation, and are haunted by the usual limits on inductive inference that plagues all contemporary social sciences.

INTRODUCTION

Culture has been a difficult term to use in both everyday and scientific discourses in the history of human societies. As a term, it implies some constructive modification of the natural course of affairs-the cultivation of "nature" by human efforts results in culture. This can take the form of some kind of goal-directed modification of features or properties of objects. Humans have been modifying nature in excessive ways, e.g., by cultivating agricultural crops as well as potted plants, domesticating animals into cattle or into pets, creating cooked foods and well-educated children. Probably the very beginning of the culture of *Homo sapiens* can be found in the invention of external devices to regulate the relations of one's body with the conditions of the changing natural environment. Thus, invention of blankets (or tree-leaves operating in that function), sandals (and shoes-to limit the contact with the walked-on surfaces), stone choppers for cutting, and – of course – uses of fire would be the first examples of changing nature to arrive at culture in the history of the human species. Yet what are the ways in which such cultivation takes place in human societies? Note that the noun -- culture -- does not carry the functions that its verb-kind extensions-- "to cultivate" or "to culture"-- might carry. The crucial tension in psychologists' discourse about culture is that between treating it as an existing entity (e.g., "culture ***is*** X"), and a process of becoming (e.g., "culturing leads to X"). Our lives are constantly those of making something new; new fads and fetishes, technologies, and prejudices are constantly being created in any society. All these phenomena are cultured (verb) and hence become cultural artifacts (see the contrast of objective and subjective culture Simmel, 1908; Triandis, 1972).

Values in culture

Values are over-generalized feeling fields (Valsiner, 2001, September) that are themselves cultured. Values have channeled our making sense of the notion of culture itself. Culture has been – in lay use as well as in science – a value-laden term. The contrast between "cultured" and "primitive" tribes has been flourishing in European discourse until it has become censored by contemporary social norms. Its replacement by the contrast between "developed" and "developing" contrast is equally denigrating, as the first are declared to have reached their final state (and are no longer developing). Or we could play further with terms here, what if the so-called "developed" societies are actually "over-developed" (and by analogy with over-ripe fruits, ready to fall and rotten)?

Obviously such games about implications of use of words can be amusing, but there is little to be gained from it. The very fact that anthropologists and psychologists have been fighting over the "proper" language use to present the obvious differences between over- and under-industrialized societies testifies to the value-laden nature of the core term of cultural sciences.

Three meanings. The notion of culture has had a long history in the social thought (see Jahoda, 1993 for a comprehensive overview). Presently the notion of culture ***as*** used in psychology ***has*** three meanings.

First, it has been used to designate *some* ***group of people who "belong together" by value of some shared features***. Thus, all the Norwegians "belong together" as they share the common language (which is only approximately true-given two Norwegian languages) and happen to also be citizens of the same country. The Welsh "belong together" as they share the common heritage of language, music, and the area of the British Isles where they have lived. Yet they do not form a separate country. The Basques or Catalans "belong together" by way of their shared language and customs, but not by the countries (Spain or France) in which they live. At the same time, the countries that separate them "belong together" in the newly constituted conglomerate, the European Union. In it, Germany is one of the major partners sharing the membership in that social unit, having been disunited itself until 1870 (and again between 1945 and 1989). In each picture of unity of, a country, ethnic or language group, etc., a case of its opposite (disunity) is embedded.

Where are individual persons in this picture of culture? They "*belong to*" a culture. This form of making sense of person and culture -- person "belongs to" culture -- simultaneously denotes the commonality of such belonging (the descriptive, or classificatory role of the use of the term), and some ,usually unspecified, causal system that guarantees the relative similarity of all the persons who "belong to" the given culture. This meaning prevails in cross-cultural psychology, and is consistent with the way anthropologists use the term as well as laypersons' everyday conception of the term.

Secondly, culture can be seen as systemic organizer of the psychological systems of individual persons; culture "belongs to" the person. Here, culture "belongs to" each individual person. It is irrelevant to which ethnic group, or country, the persons "belong to", since culture is functioning within the intra-psychological systems of each person. Culture is part of the self-organizing it in ways that are functional for the personal life (Hermans, 2001).

In the third meaning of culture, we can say that the term "belongs to" how the person and the environment are interrelated. Of course the meaning of "belonging to" here breaks down, there is no specifiable "owner" (or "carrier") of the culture. Instead, culture becomes exemplified through different processes by which persons interact with their worlds. This perspective requires conceptual separation of the person and the world, a step that often becomes criticized as "dualism". However, analytically, differentiation of the parts of a whole, as long as the whole is maintained in place, is not a case of constructing a "dualism", but elaborating the functioning structure of the whole. To use a recurrent example that psychologists have thought of over a century, the quality of a whole ("water") is not de-valued by the fact that this whole (substance) entails the duality of hydrogen and oxygen --and its link-- in its chemical composition. If chemistry as science were to be worried about "dualism" inherent in any chemical substance, no science of chemistry could have emerged from its historical basis of alchemy.

Researchers' analytic strategies: two kinds of distinctions. There are thus two ways of making a distinction: "***exclusive***" and "***inclusive***" separation. The former leads to atomistic separation of elements out of the whole (with the loss of the whole). All reduction of complex wholes into their elementary constituents are of that kind. Psychology's reliance on the use of statistical methods has socially prescribed the practice of "exclusive separation" of elementary units from a complex whole (e.g., items on standardized tests assumed to reveal the same whole-quality, e.g., "collectivism", while being independent of one another). In contrast, the "inclusive separation" is a strategy of distinguishing parts of the whole-enabling the researcher to look at the relations between the "inclusively separated" parts of the whole:

If the person and environment are considered as inclusively separated, culture is considered as a process of ***internalization*** and ***externalization*** (see Valsiner, 1997) or mutual constituting between person and the social world (Shweder, 1990). If the researcher refuses to introduce a boundary between person and the social world (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1998), the process of culture becomes elaborated in terms of ***appropriation***, ***guided participation***, or ***mastery***. Culture here "is" these posited processes, rather than an entity.

Culture Within the Tradition of Cross-Cultural Psychology

Cross-cultural psychology has much in common with traditional psychology in that it often involves comparisons between two or more groups of individuals. It is often considered to be a major method of inquiry concerning the ways in which culture affects human thought and behavior. The groups thus compared are different ethnic, geographic, or administratively united groups, labeled "cultures". Cross-cultural psychology mostly uses the first model outlined above (PERSONS "BELONG" TO CULTURE). As such, "cultures" in cross-cultural psychology have the following properties. These assumptions fit with those made in non-developmental psychology about groups of persons (united by some characteristics, e.g., male versus female). This is understandable, since from its beginning cross-cultural psychology has been based on the non-developmental premises in psychology :

1. *Qualitative homogeneity*. It is assumed that each and every "member of the culture" (that is, person who "belongs to" that culture) shares with each and every other member the same set of cultural features. There can be inter-individual differences in the quantitative side of such sharing (some persons share more of the given feature than others), yet all of them share many or most of the same features. However, because most nation-states (cultures, societies) are quite heterogeneous, cross-cultural psychologists realize how important it is to define the nature of the samples that are selected in research.
2. *Temporal stability*. It is assumed that the set of cultural features (shared by the persons who are "members of the culture") is the same over time-even as the membership of persons in a culture changes from generation to generation. Even if historical changes

take place in a given society, culture is characterized through focus on its stability. Thus, the guillotines of the French Revolution, or the political homicides of Stalinist Russia, Pol Pot's Laos, the nuclear "mushrooms" over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the collapse of Word Trade Center in New York under attack, etc. are not assumed to dramatically modify the cultures involved. Without any doubt such tragic events destabilize the previous social order, but whether or not they lead the societies onto new developmental trajectories is characteristically not investigated when temporal stability is assumed. History here becomes viewed on the side of continuity, rather than change. Additionally, cross-cultural psychology is also interested in why and how cultures change over time, even if such changes are relatively minor over short periods. Here the focus of cross-cultural psychology follows the lead of non-developmental psychology at large, sharing the recognition of change, and lacking explicit conceptual tools to look at development (compare with Kurt Lewin's efforts to "define the field at the given time"; Lewin, 1943).

How to work with differences? Three strategies. People of course are very different within any society. Inter-individual differences between persons from the given society – who are said to "share" or "participate in" a "culture" – are viewed as quantitative. These are a matter of degree rather than of another quality. The characteristics by which the groups are contrasted with one another are seen as ontological givens rather than open to development. Thus, homogeneous "culture" groups are often compared with one another in cross-cultural psychology. For example, "the American culture" might be represented by a sample of college undergraduates, and be compared with "the Italian culture" represented by a sample of university students from Palermo. It should be obvious that the reason why groups (called "samples" from a "culture") are often contrasted in such ways is because the groups in question include individuals who are ***relatively similar*** between themselves in the group as to interesting features. Surely most (or all) university students from Palermo have interesting features in common – such as expectations as to what a "normal mid-day meal" is – and most (or all) of them may differ from an analogous similarity of such "shared expectations" within the sample of college undergraduates in the U.S.A.. The researchers here are at a crossroads – to emphasize the relative similarity of the sample (consisting of individual persons), or to focus on the inter-individual variability within each sample. Whichever road is preferred at that junction of construction of the research perspective it sets up the scope of the knowledge that becomes available to them in their subsequent data derivation.

There are three basic strategies used by social scientists to deal with differences:

- CONSTRUCTIVELY IGNORE THEM --> treat groups (of notable inter-individual variability) as if these are qualitatively homogeneous. This allows researchers to talk about abstracted homogenized entities such as "individualist" (or "collectivist") "cultures", "male" (or "female") gender roles, "developed" versus "developing" societies, etc.

- FOCUS ON INTER-INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES --> it is usual in psychology, whenever the differences within a sample are noted (and not ignored), to transform the existing research question into that of "individual differences" (by which the differences between individuals in a sample at a cross-section of historical time is indicated). Here relative stability of the interesting phenomena is assumed to apply within each person, while there is variation between persons.
- FOCUS ON INTRA-INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES (DEVELOPMENT) --> this strategy (in contrast to the other two) is based on developmental assumptions. There is no longer the assumption of relative stability in place for individuals, just the contrary: each individual is expected to change in some direction in ways that become temporarily stable – yet lead to further change. Relative stability here is temporarily relative stability; persons who may be for a long time be "similar" in some feature (e.g., Italian students preferring certain foods) may (over time and change in conditions, e.g., emigration) change their food preferences in individually specific ways. Or within a society that may have been unified through acceptance of one religion, under social turmoils, individuals convert to a variety of new religious belief systems.

Of the three strategies, cross-cultural psychology has mostly utilized the first two separately or in some combination. This is fully in line with psychology at large, where ontological questions have dominated issues of emergence of novelty.

What kinds of generalizations are made in cross-cultural psychology? In Figure 1 the basic structure of generalization of knowledge about culture in psychological issues is presented. Let us begin from an admittedly simplified hierarchical structure of societies, which entails individual persons, social institutions, societies themselves, and an overgeneralized notion of "humankind" at the ultimate top of the hierarchy. This picture is simplified as it overlooks a number of existing intermediate levels within the hierarchy – those of transient social groups (between individuals and institutions), government bureaucracies (which, as institutions themselves, introduce sub-hierarchy into the institutions society commention of levels). Nevertheless, the simplified picture illustrates the complexity of the social hierarchy and the ways in which cross-cultural psychology counstructs its knowledge.

The hierarchy in Figure 1 entails multiple connections. The same individual person can be a participant in more than one social institution (e.g., individuals X, Y, V), some can even simultaneously belong to institutions of different societies (Z). The specific ties with specific institutions may change over the person's life course. A politician in the government (institution S) of society A may be simultaneously a member of the central intelligence agency (institution T) of country B. Children who have at times lived in one country and experienced its formal schooling institution, may migrate to another society and encounter a very different schooling environment. As a result, the children may develop self systems adapted for both societies differently.

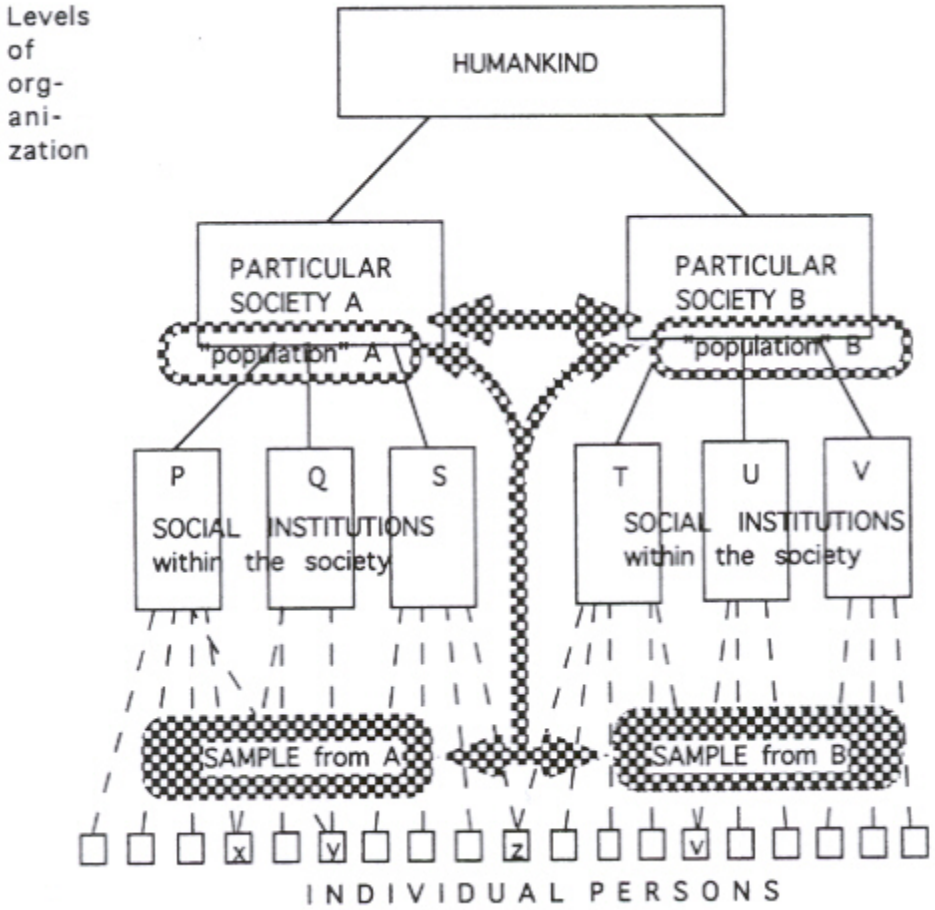

Figure 1. Creating generalized knowledge through sample-to-population inference in cross-cultural psychology

Cross-cultural psychology often employs (but is not necessarily limited to) the traditional strategy of group comparisons in establishing knowledge about culture. The particular societies (A, B., in Figure 1.) become re-labeled as culture A and culture B. Individual persons on the bottom of the social hierarchy become members of the culture (A or B). After such semantic change, it becomes meaningful in cross-cultural psychology to establish knowledge about culture A and culture B by comparing the two on the basis of psychological data derived from their members. Cross-cultural psychologists are also wary of two group comparisons because, it can be argued, such limited comparisons can be quite ambiguous. Thus, using three or more samples from different societies in most research is considered advisable, and in empirical work in cross-cultural psychology one often finds many samples from different countries carefully compared. Yet the number of samples in such comparisons does not change the logic of generalization that necessarily includes homogenization of the information extracted from the samples, per "culture".

Since the set of members in A (as in B) is considered qualitatively homogeneous, it is possible for cross-cultural psychology to think in terms of random sampling from the pool of culture members in an effort to let the sample data represent the abstraction called

"population". However, truly random samples of individuals from any social setting are extremely difficult and basically impossible to get. This has been seen as an ongoing methodological problem that is of major concern to psychology in general and cross-cultural psychology in particular. The problem can be solved easily, however, if the notion of non-random sampling is accepted. The only reason why psychologists need to convince themselves and their audience that their samples are "random" is to make the generalization to populations legitimate.

Population is the abstract full representation of all members of the given social unit (society, community, ethnic group, etc. – "culture"). It is hoped that the data that characterize the population (as taken from the sample) can characterize the culture ("population"=culture A). Hence it makes sence in cross-cultural psychology to make comparisons between populations (cultures) A and B, of the general kind:

A -- *is* (or *is not*) different from -- B

Such kind of knowledge is the ***end result*** of inductive generalizations made in cross-cultural psychology. It can empirically map out psychological differences dependent upon the methods used-between different groups of persons, labeled culture members, and considered to be a homogeneous set. The empirical reality is that of comparisons between sample, generalization from it moves instantly to abstracted claims about differences of cultures (see Figure 1.)

It is possible to see from Figure 1. that the cross-cultural knowledge construction strategy overlooks the hierarchical organization of human social life. The organizing role of different levels (and combinations) of social institutions is not taken into account in this construction of data about cultures as represented by populations of assumedly homogeneous kinds. Explanation of the empirically discovered differences in cross-cultural psychology are not explainable within the theoretical system of cross-cultural psychology, except in tautological terms (e.g., culture A "causes" the sample from A to be different from sample from B, which is "caused" by culture B). In cross-cultural psychology, a similar move of turning a descriptive label into explanatory essence can be observed. For example, it could be said that the "Italian-ness" of Italian subjects can be recruited to explain their behavior, in contrast to the "American-ness" of the American subjects. The construction of explanations like this is circular -- Italians are found to be Italian because they are from Italy; and Americans to be American because they are from America (or from the United States). Interestingly, quite often there is considerable overlap in "distributions", that is, it could easily happen that Italians are more "American" in their responses than Americans, and vice versa. Cross-cultural psychologists-similarly to cultural psychologists (see below) believe that culture is antecedent to all behavior (Adamopoulos and Lonner, 1997), but exactly what is involved in this process is difficult to specify because of methodological and conceptual difficulties.

It is obvious that cross-cultural psychology's use of the term "culture" is limited to being an overgeneralizing label. If some evidence allows one to treat particular phenomena (as found within a sample) ***as if*** these represent a larger collective unit

(labeled culture – a given ethnic or language group, or a political-administrative unit – a country), then the evidence obtained becomes generalized to all "members of the culture." This is possible only under the assumption of qualitative homogeneity (as described above), and cross-cultural psychologists are wary of painting phenomena with too broad a brush. Hence anybody working on issues of culture – in psychology or other discipline – must be very cautious about making generalizations that are unwarranted. Not only is the assumption of homogeneity unwarranted, it also leads to making comparisons that obscure, rather than reveal, the underlying phenomena. These cautions are part and parcel of all books involved in cross-cultural methodological perspectives. (see van de Vijver's chapter in this unit for an overview of different methodological strategies used by cross-cultural psychologists, depending upon the type of questions being asked.)

Limits for Inductive Inference in Psychology. The limits of the empirical generalization in cross-cultural psychology are the same for all group-comparisons based investigations in psychology. These limits stem from the general logic of inductive generalization-in and by itself, such generalization in principle cannot be conclusive. Science operates consistently through coordinating two oppositely directed knowledge construction processes; from particular phenomena to generalization (***inductive*** line) and from general principles to setting the stage for the study of particulars (***deductive*** line). The art of science is in the ways in which these two lines are made to meet. Methodology is not a "tool-box" or ready-made methods, but a cyclical process of coordinating the inductive and deductive lines of knowledge construction (Branco & Valsiner, 1997).

All psychology – not only the cross-cultural side – struggles with the problem of making sense of group comparisons. The usual solution to explaining group differences is the turning of the descriptive features of the group into causal essences. Some feature by which two groups clearly differ is turned into a causal entity that is supposed to explain some other – usually relative – difference. For example, a comparison of males and females (samples of persons, described as "males" and "females") leads to interpretation of the differences as if those are caused by "gender"; "maleness" is seen to cause the difference of the males from the females, whose difference is caused by "femaleness".

This shift from detected ***relative*** inter-group differences to ***absolute*** causal statements about posited "essences" entails a leap in thought – a change of the frame of reference the researcher uses (Valsiner, 1997). The empirical inter-group comparison takes place within the ***inter-individual frame of reference*** (comparison of two or more samples, or individuals), while the interpretation is given within the ***intra-individual reference frame*** (through reference to causal feature inherent in the "generic specimen" within a sample, see Valsiner, 1986).

The levels of analysis problem. Shifts in frames of reference reflect the lack of clarity about levels of organization (and, subsequently, analysis) of the phenomena. The notion of culture is applicable at different levels of systemic organization of psychological phenomena – individual persons, social groups, communities, social institutions, nations, etc. (see Figures 1 and 2). The organization of human psychological nature at one level

(e.g., that of individual persons) does not need to be similar to that at another level (e.g., that of a nation state, or ethnic group). Consequently empirical data obtained at one level (e.g., samples from a population of "X-speakers") need not reflect the organization of the psychological domains of either individuals in that sample, or of the social groups formed out of these individuals (see Smith, 2002-ORPC, Unit 2, Chapter 7).

Consider the use of correlational approaches by anthropologists based on the HREF, Human Relations Area Files (Ember & Ember, 2000; Murdock, 1981). HREF is a depository of knowledge about different societies and ethinc groups ("cultures") where different aspects of the cultural practices are rated per society. These ratings can be conveniently analyzed by correlating them; for example "parental restrictiveness" can be correlated with "sibling rivalry". Such correlations will be based on a sample of codes of 150+ different societies in HRAF. Any correlation resulting from such analysis pertains to the level of some kind of "hypersociety" (that consists of all the 150+ societies), a social unit that one can contemplate of as potentially functioning, but that has no reality (European Union comes closest as a real example of such "hypersociety"). The correlational results pertain to the Level 3 in the hierarchy of levels:

Level 3 ("hypersociety"= a whole consisting of societies)
Level 2 (individual societies as wholes)
Level 1 (individual persons in each of the societies)

If the correlational data of these kinds were to be interpreted adequately, they tell us something only about Level 3, and are not usable for making inference about organization of phenomena at Level 2 and Level 1. Yet very often the interpretations "jump" from Level 3 to Level 1 (e.g., statements like "cross-cultural evidence has shown that a parent's restrictiveness in childrearing is linked with sibling rivalry"). Vulnerability of such correlational analyses to specific implied conditions has been dramatically demonstrated (deMunck & Korotayev, 2000). It has been demonstrated that inter-individual and intra-individual variances are not the same (Molenaar, Huizenga & Nesselroade, 2002). This leads to a major difference between developmentally oriented approaches (which rely upon intra-individual variance) and ontologically-oriented psychology (with its reliance upon inter-individual variance (or the so-called "individual differences" approach). This contrast plays its role also at the distinguishing of cultural and cross-cultural psychologies.

Culture Within the Traditions of Cultural Psychology

In contrast with cross-cultural psychology, different versions of cultural psychology operate with notions of culture of inherently the systemic kind. There is continuity in cultural psychology with the systemic traditions of folk psychology of different kinds (Wilhelm von Humboldt's and Wilhelm Wundt's traditions) as well as those of European ethnology and social and cultural anthropology.

The traditions of social anthropology in thinking about culture have partially supported this extra-personal look at culture. For instance, according to Bronislaw Malinowski, culture consists of "coordinated social institutions" that are

> ...integrated on a series of principles such as the community of blood through procreation; the contiguity in space related to cooperation; the specialization in activities; and last but not least, the use of power in political organization. Each culture owes its completeness and self-sufficiency to the fact that it satisfies the whole range of basic, instrumental and integrative needs. (Malinowski, 1944, p. 40)

Here culture operates as the set of external organizing principles (and institutions) for human beings in their social contexts. What was missed in cross-cultural psychology - the structure of social organizational forms that make up society – was clearly highlighted in social anthropology. On the intra-personal side, the reference to "need satisfaction" indicates that culture remains a tool for such satisfaction, rather than becoming part of those "basic, instrumental, and integrative needs" itself.

In the 1990s, the scene of psychology experienced a re-birth in the notion of culture. This re-birth of old traditions of ***Völkerpsychologie*** in the form of different versions of cultural psychology constitutes another attempt to make sense of complex psychological phenomena. All these efforts are united by treating culture as a part of the person's psychological system. Here culture "belongs to" the individual psychological system and plays some functional role in it. The person of course belongs to one or another country, language or ethnic group, or religious belief system. That social participation undoubtedly provides material for the psychological system within which culture is located. Thus, the language the person uses to interact within his or her society is a semiotic tool within the person's intra-psychological system. It guides the ways the person thinks, feels, and formulates utterances.

As a result, the ways of knowledge construction in cultural psychology differ cardinally from those of cross-cultural psychology (see Figure 2).

Cultural psychology begins from sampling of an individual person together with his or her participation in social institutions (e.g., V in Figure 2). It is the individual case-studied as an integrated system in its interaction with environment that is the basis for all scientific data in psychology. Cultural psychology merely follows the classic traditions of psychophysics, the "Würzburg School" of cognitive psychology, and learning traditions of the past in which the notion of aggregation of data before these are analyzed to reveal their qualitative functioning would lead to reduction of precision and elimination of possibility to generalize (cf. Thorngate, 1992). This classic tradition of natural sciences has lost its prominence in the social practices of our contemporary psychology. It will return once the futility of large-samples-based research becomes evident.

How does generalization proceed, based on individual cases? Based on the systemic analysis of the individual-in-social-context, a generalized model of the cultural functioning of the person is constructed. That systemic model is further tested empirically

on the basis of another selected individual (e.g., Z who belongs to two societies), which leads to the modification of the systemic model. The modified model is further tested on a selected individual case, and so on. Together with such hermeneutic construction of knowledge about person as culturally functioning system, the generalized model becomes ideally applicable to human beings in their generic state. Such generalizations thus apply to all humankind, as these are seen to generate the inter-individual differences between persons. Cultural psychology is part of the psychological science that is oriented towards discovery of basic fundamental principles. Thus, ***cultural psychology is part of general psychology*** as a basic science, while cross-cultural psychology belongs to differential psychology. The two are complementary to each other. As the cultural psychologist Ernst Boesch has said, a good cross-cultural psychological project or study should be preceded by a careful analysis of the culture(s) in question.

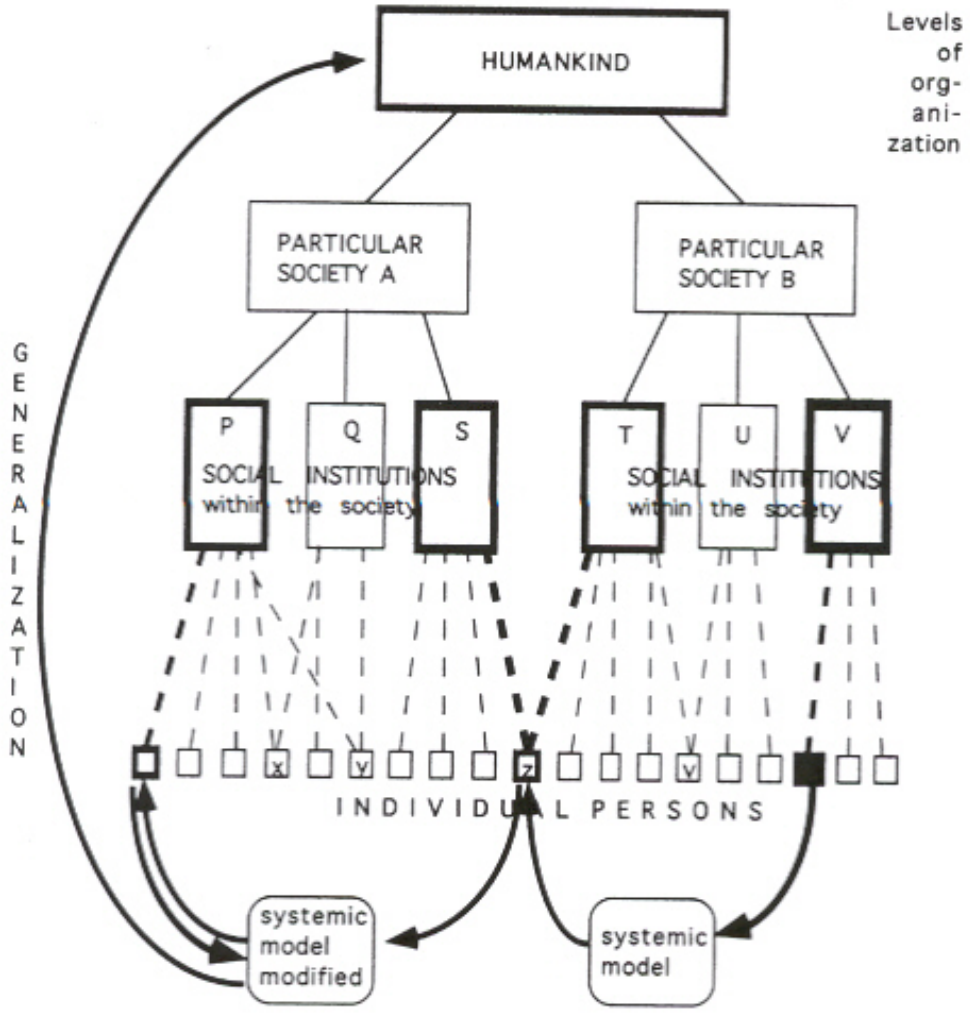

Figure 2. Generalization based on structurally situated individual cases in cultural psychology.

Different Specific Versions of Cultural Psychology

There are two basic directions within cultural psychology. One can distinguish the semiotic (sign-mediated) and activity orientations in using culture.

Culture as semiotic mediation. Culture can refer to semiotic (sign) mediation that is part of the system of organized psychological functions. These functions can be intra-personal (i.e., the functioning of a person's intra-psychological processes while being involved in experiencing the world: feeling, thinking, memorizing, forgetting, planning, etc.). Thus, a person – observing a painting – who says to oneself (in the mind) "I like this" is involved in an act of intra-psychological semiotic regulation of one's feelings. Complexity of such intra-psychological semiotic mediation devices can include created hierarchies. A person can create – in one's intra-psychological system – an "alter ego" with whom one can enter into lengthy internal dialogues. Such dialogues involve the use of signs, including in ways that entails hierarchical relations between those.

Consider the example where a person creates one's own "personal deity" – be it a figure of a god, ancestor's spirit, or any other powerful intra-psychological "social other". Such deity is set up as the powerful source whom to turn for help – yet that source is set up by the person oneself. Thus, the person's semiotic mediation system includes two hierarchical layers:

> HIGHER LEVEL: "I (person) govern YOU (deity)--
> as you are my construction"
> LOWER LEVEL: "As powerful deity, YOU should govern ME"
> (cf. Valsiner, 1999)

This example indicates the flexibility of intra-psychological semiotic mediation – a system like the one described is an example of CIRCULAR HIERARCHY (where PERSON > DEITY > PERSON). Such circular hierarchies are adaptive-under some conditions these turn into strict linear ones (become transitive), under other conditions they become open to integrating new parts into the system. For example, allowing doubt to enter into a circular hierarchical relation PERSON > DEITY > PERSON may "open the cycle" in ways unexpected to the participants (Lawrence, Benedikt, & Valsiner, 1992). It is therefore no surprise that political and religious social institutions do their utmost to prevent the transformation of a closed (strict, or circular) hierarchies into open ones.

Semiotic mediation can also take place in the inter-personal realm: different persons are involved in chatting, fighting, persuading each other, avoiding (one another, or some domains of experiencing). This kind of discursive practice can entail much more than mere interaction or "exchange of information". It can include strategic interactions, setting up the "semiotic traps" for the interlocutors, and ideological declarations. Consider an example from a close relationship:

Very often she was to ask: "Do *you want* to do this?" And he did not know. She would fill the void, for the sake of filling it, for the sake of advancing, moving, feeling, and then he implied: "*You are pushing* me." (Nin, 1987, p. 6, added emphasis)

The interpersonal dynamic described here is closely tied with the intra-psychological meaning-making about oneself. One person gets the other to confess to X, and then applies a moralistic "capture net" to it ("*how could you* do X to me?")

Last, but not least, culture – seen as semiotic mediation – can be *a tool in the goals-oriented actions by social institutions*, which try to regulate both the inter-personal and intra-personal psychological functions. Such institutions set up the social rules for interaction, monitor their maintenance, and expect that situated activity and interaction to lead to intra-psychological transformation of the personal cultural systems. The use of uniforms, activities like marching, chanting, and group dancing set up such semiotic mediation system.

Culture, psychology, and thinking. One of the forms of sign mediation is the use of folk models (in anthropological terminology) or social representations (in terms of social psychology).

In contemporary cognitive anthropology the notion of folk models-social representations carried by persons but set up through social construction-has gained ground. The notion of folk models is a fitting compromise for anthropology and cognitive science. From the standpoint of cognitive anthropology, there exist three major kinds of views on "culture" in anthropology (elaborated after D'Andrade1984, pp. 115-116):

1) *Culture is seen as existing knowledge*: it is the accumulation of information (irrespective of the extent to which that information is shared between people who belong to the group which has access to the information). Here the focus is on the socially shared knowledge and cognitive operations by which such knowledge can be handled. It is important to add here the value of *existing ignorance* (see Moore & Tumin, 1949). In any society, interconnectedly with the proliferation of new knowledge, new ignorance is purposefully constructed.
2) *Culture is seen as consisting of existing core conceptual structures* that provide basis for intersubjectively shared representation of the world in which the persons live. This perspective does not emphasize the moment of accumulation (of information), but is rather a set of rules that makes it possible for persons to arrive at shared understandings. The notion of c*ollective and social representations* belongs here (Valsiner, 2002, August). The anthropological equivalent of this orientation is the use of notions *folk model* or *cultural model*. This perspective is ontologically rooted – the representations or models are expected to have their reality of existence.
3) *Culture is construction of conceptual structures by activities of persons*. This perspective entails a look at how cognitive mechanisms come into being – in ontogeny and in cultural history. The perspectives of Lev Vygotsky (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991) and Heinz Werner (Valsiner, 2003) belong here. The focus here is on ***emerging phenomena*** of cultural construction-the conceptual structures emerge from the flow of everyday interaction between persons, between person and environment, and are guided by social institutions (schools, media, military, etc.)

Acting and Reflecting: Culture as a Psychological Distancing Device

It is precisely the capacity and propensity to make and use semiotic devices that allows human beings to become distanced in relation to their immediate life contexts. The person becomes simultaneously an actor who is immersed in the given "situated activity context", and-at the same time – is a reflexive agent who is distanced from the very setting in which one is immersed (Cupchik, 2002; Del Rio, 2002). In each being (in a setting) is the root for becoming (changing the setting, or one's relation to it).

This duality of ***HERE*** and ***NON-HERE*** is relevant for transcending the adaptational demands of the here-and-now context, and guide the development towards increasing autonomy. All adaptation is pre-adaptation to the next moment's situational demands upon the organism. The organism is adapting to conditions which are only approximately known at here-and-now, since it has to anticipate possible changes in that. Thus any autonomy is a result of the immediate dependence upon the here-and-now context (as the open-systemic nature of any developing system – be it biological, psychological, or social – entails). Thus the investigations of cemeteries (and people's personal construction of the dead -Josephs, 1998), brothels (Albert, 2001), gynecologists' offices (Emerson, 1970) or adolescents' thrill-seeking (Lightfoot, 1997) are central for the study of cultural organization of human minds.

Participant reflection. Psychological distancing always includes the context within which the person is, and in relation to which the distancing takes place. It takes the form of I reflect upon this context in which I am a part. This reflection – which is cognitive and affective at the same time – allows the psychological system to consider contexts of the past, imagine contexts of the future, and take perspectives of other persons (in the form of empathy). Without distancing, no considerations by a person of contexts other than the given here-and-now would be possible.

In summary, it can be seen that the use of "culture" in psychology has proceeded in two different ways. One of those, the external/formal use of culture as a descriptive term, has been utilized in cross-cultural psychology. The other, treating culture as an inherent part of human psychological functions, has been used in cultural psychology.

Culture "Transfer"

How is it possible to transfer one's created cultural system from one person to another? As was shown above, culture can be viewed as a process (rather than an entity). How is it possible to transfer the constructed cultural mediating devices from the parents to their offspring? Such inter-generational transfer is extremely important for continuity of society. Yet simulataneously it has to guarantee constant adaptation of the persons (through their culture) to novel circumstances of life. Culture "transfer" includes transformation of what is being "transferred". Two general models of "culture transfer" can be found in the thinking of scientists and laypersons.

The unidirectional culture transfer model. The unidirectional notion considers the developing person – the recipient of the cultural transmission or socialization endeavours – ***passive in his acceptance*** (or failure of it – a "miss" or an "error" of the "transmission") of the cultural messages. The recipient's role is merely either to accept the messages aimed at him, or perhaps fail to do so, but in any case the recipients are not assumed to re-organize the received message.

The messages are de facto viewed as fixed entities. They are either accepted by the receiver as givens, or (in case of their incomplete acceptance) with an "error of transmission". The most widespread concrete application of such uni-directional model is in technical systems. The role of the recipient of these messages is that of the mere acceptor of all the "influences", rather than that of a constructive (albeit limited) modifier of those.

The unidirectional model is deeply rooted in our common sense fits with the nature of technological systems, where the information to be transmitted is fixed, closed to development, and where the exact copy-like nature of transmission of the given message is a desired goal.

We depend increasingly upon modern slaves-technological devices. We expect those devices to transfer messages without errors. Nobody is happy about modifications in computer files or poor quality xerox copies. In both cases, the desired transmission quality is 100% replication of the original, and anything less than that may be a serious fault or error. ***BUT*** of course ***we are not expecting xerox copies to develop***, in relation to the original, any new properties!

The unidirectional model of transmission is widespread – it permeates our common language meanings. It is preferred by social institutions which try to regulate the lives of individual persons. Thus, it has its counterpart in the language of psychology and education. Thus, it is often considered that children's psychological functions are "shaped" or "molded" by their parents, teachers, or peers. Knowledge is viewed as something given – which is to be "learned" (as opposed to re-created). Discourse in traditional education, anthropology, and child psychology has habitually accepted the implications of the unidirectional transfer view. This has been possible by the lack of understanding of basic processes of development.

The bi-directional transfer model: active co-construction. Development of any kind and level (biological, psychological, sociological) is an open-systemic phenomenon in which novelty is ***constantly in the process of being created***. Hence the unidirectional transfer model cannot fit any of the open-systemic processes. It is the second model – the bi-directional transfer model – which can fit the nature of open systems

The bi-directional model is based on the premise that all participants in the cultural transfer of knowledge are ***actively transforming the cultural messages***. In fact, it might be more adequately called multi-directional transfer model – since the active role of all participants leads to multiple courses of reconstruction of messages.

The "older" generation – parents, teachers, older peers, mass media, etc – actively assemble messages of a certain unique form, which are meant to canalize the

development of the younger persons. Yet these younger persons -equally actively – analyze the messages, and re-assemble the "incoming cultural information" in a personally novel form. Thus, their analysis/synthesis of these messages is the process of exchange relations with their cultural environments that developmental sciences would study. Novelty is expected to result from the syntheses some of the time – in forms that are personally unique (even if they resemble socially known phenomena. For example, a child's first synthesis of a word meaning is new for that child, while the word may be well defined in the given language), as well as in forms that are unique in general (e.g., new inventions in technology, arts, or sciences) .

This view of cultural transmission entails construction of novelty both during encoding and decoding of the cultural messages. In some sense, the "message" as such never exists in any "given" form, as it is reconstructed by the encoder (who may start with a certain goal in mind, but shift it while creating the message), and by the decoder in a similar manner. As the roles of the encoder and decoder are constantly being changed into each other, cultural transmission involves transformation of culture in real time, by participants in the social discourse.

Construction of Cultural Forms

How does temporary stabilty of cultural forms emerge from the bi-directional culture transfer process. As emphasized above, the bi-directional process is that of constant decomposing and recomposing of communicative messages. Yet, in some way, some relatively stable meanings – and their carrying forms – emerge from that process.

A reasonable answer to that question was provided by the Turkish-American social psychologist Muzafer Sherif in the 1930s. Sherif's classic work *The psychology of social norms* (Sherif, 1936), and his ingenious experimental study of the autokinetic movement (Sherif, 1937) are known in social psychology. Sherif understood the normativity of psychology very well:

> When, in his studies, a psychologist or sociologist imposes the norms of his own community-centrism upon the community-centrism of other peoples, the outcome is an impossible confusion. (Sherif, 1936, p. 16)

This verdict fits cultural and cross-cultural psychologies in the 1990s as well as it fitted psychology in the 1930s. There is the necessity for a scientist to rise above both one's own culturally constructed values and beliefs, as well as those of the persons under study. This can happen by actual valuing of one's own and "the other's" ways of being, rather than direct interventions into the lives of the others. Both cultural and cross-cultural psychologists appreciate the dangers of simplistic intervention.

Social norms as cultural constructions. Sherif's look at the emergence and transformation of social norms was explicitly developmental. Thus, contemporary cultural psychology

could claim his classic work as one of its predecessors. Sherif viewed social norms as vehicles for change:

> Social norms are not absolutes. They develop in the course of actual relationships between individuals. They presuppose for their formation the contact of individuals striving toward the satisfaction of their needs and the realization of what they consider "I" or "We," the latter indicating the group with which "I" identifies itself. Therefore the norms may change, and do change eventually with the important changes in the structure of the situation that gave rise to those norms in the beginning (Sherif, 1936, p, 17)

For Sherif – similarly to Vygotsky – it was important to take into account the whole cultural history of different societies. The cultural history is often closely intertwined by the history of major social institutions, especially those which have guided individuals over many generations towards their internalized reconstruction of the value systems, exemplified in specific activity practices (or their avoidances). Thus,

> Present freshly boiled pork chops to two hungry men. One of our hungry men is a Mohammedian whose religion tells him that anything connected with pigs ***is disgusting*** – this is an established taboo, a norm. The other person is a Christian. He will seize the chops and eat them with gusto. The first person will ***not only not touch the chops, he will be filled with disgust for them and for the person who eats such filthy things.*** (Sherif, 1936, p. 28, added emphases)

Sherif's example illustrates the ways in which cultural internalization works at the level of person's affective processes. History of cultural belief systems entails constructive replication-at times involving attenuation, at times-amplification-of the specific meaning action complexes by persons in each new generation. A particular historically maintained belief-religious or political-can be reconstructed by the young in a given society in an escalated (exaggerated) way-as a means to build their own personal cultural worlds and negotiate their roles within the changing society. Religious cults emerge, may proliferate (e.g., in the 3rd-4th Centuries of our era Christianity was a persecuted and stigmatized cult), or disappear. They may reappear generations later, in novel forms.

Sherif's example also holds a key to the emergence of interpersonal and inter-group segregation. The person who finds pig-eating "disgusting" (as a result of one's personal internalization of values) reconstructs also the other (pig-eater) as such. Generalization here takes place from the act (of eating) to the person (the eater), and then to the assumed class of similar persons.

Social norms co-constructed within a group. The social construction of group norms, and the resiliency of these norms, is constantly evidenced by various kinds of religious sects that establish their own standards for how to live themselves, and how to evaluate others' living their lives.

A classic description of such cult is given by Festinger, Riecken and Schachter (1956). A group of people becomes united around the calling by the cult leader to be "prepared for the end of the World". The expected event, the collapse of the whole World, was fortified by the "miracle of God's revelation" to the group leader. It constituted the "symbolic version" of the stationary light (viewed as moving) in Sherif's autokinetic experiment. An event expected in the future – but prepared for today – is indeterminate, and therefore open for the construction of group norms by people oriented towards that outcome. The goal-oriented group establishes its internal norms, ingroup/outgroup distinction ("we the special people" versus "the others"). The only difficulty may arise if the known doomsday passes without the event. Under conditions of rationality, this should falsify the system of group norms and beliefs. Yet, under the circumstances of sect-like groups, the disconfirmation can fortify the norms. Thus any social norm (or belief) can develop in three possible ways when being challenged (see Figure 3.)

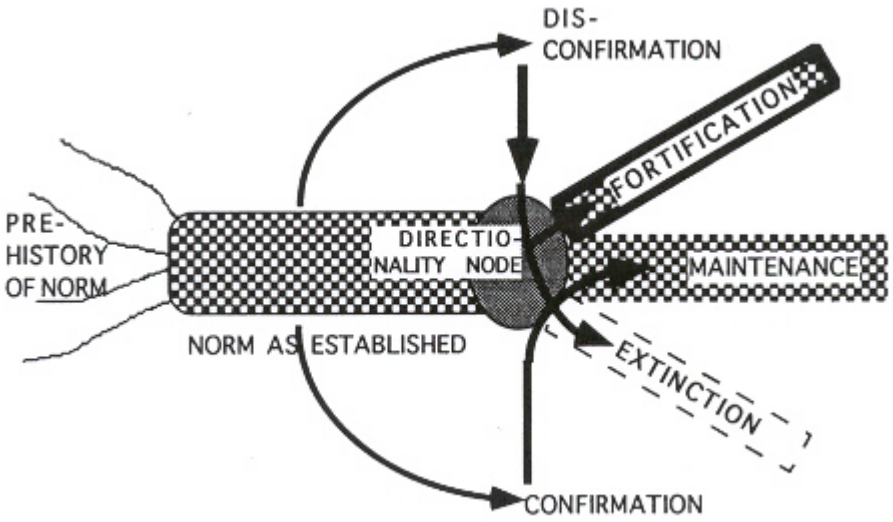

Figure 3. Trajectories of the fate of a constructed social norm

The crucial issue for cultural developmental psychology is how to understand the mechanisms operating in that bifurcation point (Directionality Node). Under what conditions would the norm be fortified, and under what other conditions may it become extinct? These questions are adequate to ask from the perspective of Lev Vygotsky, as well as from the perspective of Kurt Lewin (his "conditional-genetic method"-Lewin, 1927). The reality of such bifurcation is made possible by the bi-directional notion of culture transfer (but not by the uni-directional transfer notion).

Intentionality as an internalized cultural function. Cultural developmental psychologists-if they live up to their claim of universality of culture within a person-need to explain complex phenomena that have usually been considered the privilege of deeply personal, subjective worlds. The notion of person's will (intention) may be crucial among those. Will is a notion with directionality and agentivity-the person executes one's will to do X.

The person's constructed intention to maintain the present social norm may distinguish between the two trajectories following the disconfirmation of a previously held belief (Figure 3). Thus, the two conditions can be analyzed in the following way:

Disconfirmation --> Extinction Disconfirmation --> Fortification. X is the current norm; Evidence disconfirms X; "I don't care about X" ***or*** "I want to believe in X; X becomes extinguished ***or*** X becomes defended & fortified.

The return to the discredited question of personal will is an inevitable link between person and the social world. Personal will can thus be viewed as a ***semiotic operator*** that provides generic orientation of the self towards the future, selectively highlighting some aspects of the present. When viewed from this angle, culture (as the system of semiotic operators) guarantees that any person would be ready to resist and counter-act social suggestions (and disconfirmation of beliefs) by the environment. Culture makes persons free from the demands of the immediate social environments, and thus makes them dependent upon the implications of the semiotic devices that have created that freedom.

Summary

Culture is a part of the systemic organization of human psychological functions. It takes the form of constructing and using signs to transform the here-and-now setting of the human being. The human beings can distance themselves from any current setting through such cultural (semiotic) means. Yet they remain parts of the setting. Hence, human cultural relating to the world entails simultaneous closeness to, and distancing from, the actual situation the person is in.

This dynamic and constructionist view on culture creates the bridge between cultural and developmental psychologies. The former investigates the process of sign construction, use and its results. These results involve novelty – the emergence of psychological phenomena that did not exist prior to the creation of new understanding, here-and-now, by way of a sign. Cultural psychology looks at the micro-settings of construction of the new. It is in this respect that it relates closely with developmental science.

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Questions for Discussion

1. How can one think of culture in ways that avoid the notion of possession ("belonging to") in our theoretical constructions?
2. How are inter-individual and intra-individual differences treated in psychology's theoretical structure? What are the implications of different ways of looking at differences for making sense of culture in psychology?
3. Why is inductive generalization-from samples to populations-limited in its knowledge construction value?
4. In what ways is the study of particular (individual) systems – persons, communities, nations – the core for knowledge construction in culture-considerate psychology?
5. Why is the "levels of analysis problem" important for psychology?
6. How are competence and ignorance two equal parts in any cultural or non-cultural-knowledge system?
7. How does the bi-directional culture transfer model allow for the development of persons and societies?
8. How can Sherif's notion of social norms be made useful for our understanding of relevant issues of cultural organization of psychological features (individualism/collectivism, cultural patterning of work teams, etc.)?